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A VIEW *of* PERSIA

BY

S. K. Shabaz

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FOREWORD.

This booklet is written with the object of bringing before the world the great need of Persia. It is written, I believe, in a Christian spirit, and with the prayer that it may be read in the same spirit. I have tried to picture life in Persia just as it is. May its reading be blessed in a very real way to all into whose hands it may fall.

THE AUTHOR.

S. K. SHABAZ

CHAPTER I.

The Land.

SITUATION.

Persia, "the Land of the Lion and the Sun," is situated in the western part of Asia, bordering the Caspian Sea on the north, the Persian Gulf on the south, Afghanistan on the east and Asiatic Turkey on the west.

AREA.

It is 900 miles from west to east and 700 miles from north to south, and covers an area of 648,000 square miles.

Its native name is Iran.

TOPOGRAPHY.

In general the country is flat, the central portion being an elevated plateau some 3,800 feet above sea level. The great Elburz chain of mountains passes through the north of the country. These mountains have an altitude of 13,000 feet above sea level and are snow-topped all the year round. Twenty miles from the town of Teheran rises the mighty peak of Demavend, which reaches a height of 20,000 feet, while on the west and south also Persia is protected by mountain ranges. The principal rivers are the Tigris, Euphrates (familiar to Bible students), the Aras or Araxes, Cyrus, Acampis and Halys.

TRANSPORTATION.

Persia has no railroad, traveling being done almost entirely either on horseback or by carriage, and even this mode of travel is difficult and dangerous owing partly to the bad state of the roads and partly

to the bands of robbers that infest the country.

In striking contrast with this the City of Teheran is equipped with telegraph, showing evidence of the entrance of western civilization.

CLIMATE.

The climate of the country is temperate, there being no extremes either of heat or cold. Snow falls heavily during the winter season but does not remain long on the ground, while the summers are long and pleasant. Spring and Fall are the rainy seasons.

CITIES.

In early times the capital city was Shushan, but later it was moved further north to Teheran, where it still remains. A century ago Teheran was a city of only 15,000 inhabitants but the removal of the capital there gave it a great impetus and it now has a population of 250,000 and is in many respects a modern city. Other prominent cities are Tabriz, Urmia, Ispahan and Kermanshah.

PRODUCTS.

The land is very productive. Here are found the finest grapes—and wheat—produced anywhere in the world, besides barley, rice, cotton, sugar-cane, potatoes, sweet corn, etc. Flowers bloom in profusion, among them being the marigold, hollyhock, violet, tulip and rose. Someone has said that "Persia is a paradise, intoxicating people with the fragrance of its roses. It is a garden, wreathing the faces of mankind into smiles by its beautiful streams."

From the beauty of the land, its situation, its rivers and its wonderful fertility, it is believed by very many that Persia is the site of the Garden of Eden.

The wild animals of the country include the tiger, wolf, jackal, wild boar, etc., while among the domestic animals are found the horse, camel, buffalo, cow, mule and sheep.

The mineral wealth of the country is at present undeveloped and it has no large industries.

The principal exports are silk, Persian rugs, tobacco, cotton and wool.

HISTORY.

Persia is the only country of ancient times which today retains its position as an individual nation. Her history dates back to 2050 B. C., when she was added to the Assyrian Empire by Ninus. She has numbered many brilliant men among her kings, including Cyrus, in whose reign the Jews returned to their own land after the captivity.

Perhaps the most interesting part in her history from a modern standpoint is that relating to her relationship with Judah and Israel at the time of Cyrus and Daniel.

GOVERNMENT.

Persia was one of the last absolute monarchies. Up to within a few months ago the Shah was absolute monarch of the country, though here as well as in other Mohammedan countries his power was influenced and limited by the religious head of the country.

Persian law is divided into two parts, the Shahr and the Urf. The Urf is the secular law, the Shahr the religious law. Of the two the Shahr has the more power. It is administered by the priests and is based upon the Koran. It is very exacting and detailed as may be judged from the fact that there are about 625 rules for sales, and over 1,400 for subjects of marriage and divorce, while it of course touches the religious life of the people also. Penalties for the breaking of the law are very severe.

CHAPTER II.

The People.

The present population of Persia numbers 10,000,000 and is made up of a number of different races. In general the people may be divided into two classes, the dwellers in towns and villages and the dwellers in tents, the latter numbering nearly 2,000,000 and including Arabs, Kurds, Leks, Turks, etc., while the former include Assyrians, Chaldeans, Hebrews and Armenians.

The Assyrians, numbering about 50,000, are perhaps the most intellectual of the people of Persia. The history of their entrance into Persia is very interesting. In early days they were a self-governing and independent people. Through contact with Israel, they came to have a knowledge of Jehovah, and many accepted Him as God and worshipped Him. Though at first persecuted severely by their fellow-countrymen, they kept true to their new faith

and in time schools of theology were formed by them. During this period their country prospered greatly and so strong was their zeal for Jehovah that missionaries traveled as far as China, Japan and India with the good news, accomplishing most of the journey on foot in the absence of other means of transportation and sometimes taking three years to reach their destinations. Then defilement crept in and the Assyrian nation lost its power, and came under the control of its enemies with the result that those who worshipped Jehovah came under terrible persecution and had to flee to the mountains. Here, though exposed to the cold of the winter and tormented by hunger and thirst, they remained true to their faith. After a while the Shah of Persia invited these persecuted Assyrians to settle in his country, where they have lived to this day. To this day there exist in Persia copies of the sacred writings of these ancient Assyrians who thus suffered for the faith. While at school one of the tasks of the author was to translate one of these books, "The Book of Hebrew," from the Old Assyrian to the modern Assyrian language.

Most of the soil of Persia is in the possession of the nobility, one noble sometimes owning as many as a hundred villages. The nobles have not obtained their positions of wealth and power through any special service to their country or any special fitness on their own part for the position. The position is hereditary, descending from father to son without any special regard for the fitness of the incumbent, and as a consequence the nobility of Per-

sia includes many degenerate and ignorant men. The titles may also be, and in many cases are, purchased by rich men for their sons. The nobles do not work. According to the custom of the country they exact from their tenants such proportion as they wish of the proceeds from their farms, such proportion usually being a half or two-thirds, in addition to which the tenant must pay certain taxes and fees and provide a certain amount of fuel for the noble's house annually. To all intents and purposes the possessions of the tenants belong to the landlord. Legally he may claim three days of labor annually from his tenant, but actually he demands just as much as he wants, and when visiting his tenant he appropriates whatever he takes a fancy to. The natural consequence of such a system is that the nobility of the land are immoral and degenerate, in fact they are the most immoral class in Persia, and are almost wholly without learning.

CHAPTER III.

Domestic Life.

The domestic life of Persia is far behind that of the West, indeed it might almost be said that to a great extent the Western idea of "home" is altogether missing.

In general the houses are divided into two parts, one of which shelters the family and the other the stock, though in some cases the same room shelters both the family and the animals. Four generations will sometimes live in one room. The houses are

built of brick and stone, with windows, not in the sides, but in the roof. This is both to make the house easier to keep warm during the winter and to serve as a protection against robbers, who are very numerous. In summer the night air is very pleasant, and it is quite a common thing for the people to sleep on the roofs of their houses during this season. There is but one door, which is kept locked at night. For protection also the houses are built very close together in villages and for cases of emergency at night a secret hole is provided in the wall through which neighbors may be spoken with. Such a precaution is necessary as night attacks by robbers on houses are very frequent. Lumber being very scarce in the country, the floors of the houses are of earth covered with grass, over this mats are spread, then a large carpet and finally rugs. No chairs are used, the people sitting on the rugs, which are scattered about on the floor. On entering a house men always remove their shoes, as men in America remove their hats. The fireplace is situated in one corner of the room. It is composed of a large dried clay bowl or pot, four to five feet high and two feet across. This is sunk into the ground, fresh air being supplied by a small channel underneath the floor of the house. The fire is kindled each morning and enough fuel placed on it to keep it burning till the next day. After some hours the wood in the fire ceases to smoke and then a large table is brought and placed over the fireplace. On this table heavy rugs are placed and during the win-

ter the household gathers round this table for warmth.

The one fireplace serves for heating and cooking. Bread is baked every day. The dough is spread out in thin sheets and these are slapped against the hot sides of the fireplace until baked. When fresh it is very good eating.

Meals are eaten seated on rugs around a cloth spread on the floor. Spoons only are used for eating, knives and forks being almost unknown in the country. Wine and whiskey are drunk with the meals and while eating a large pipe called the "water-pipe" is passed round the table, each member of the family smoking in turn. The men and women do not sit down to eat together, men eat first and the women after the men are through. There is always enough food and a welcome for an unexpected visitor. The common peasants have four or five meals a day.

During the summer it is customary for the household to take tea at about 4 or 5 P. M. seated on the grass in the vineyards.

Ordinarily the peasants only work during the summer months. The winters are spent largely indoors. Their work during the summer is largely confined to their own farms and many of them have never in all their lives been more than five or six miles from their homes. As a consequence there is practically nothing known of the outside world.

The women work all the year round, making rugs, cloth, etc., in the winter and tending the gardens in the summer. All the food is prepared by the women.

The birth of a child is a time of great interest in a Persian household. The birth of a boy causes great rejoicing, both in the home itself and among the relatives and friends. Congratulations are received and great festivity marks the occasion. The birth of a daughter, however, causes no such rejoicing. On the contrary, it is received with mourning and sadness. No congratulations are received and the parents do not welcome the new arrival. Even the mother grieves over her ill-fortune while the father looks upon the unfortunate mother as an object of hatred because she has borne him a girl-child instead of a boy. The poor little mite of humanity receives very little care. On the other hand the boy is taken every care of, and precautions are used to prevent him from falling under the influence of the "evil eye." The mother will not allow anyone to praise him and leaves him dirty lest because of his good looks the "evil eye" should bring illness or death to him. The parents seldom devote much of their time to the education of the children beyond teaching them as early as possible to recite the formula, "I testify that there is no Deity but God, and I testify that Mahomet is God's Apostle." Religious pride is, however, instilled into him and he early learns to hate any other religion than his own.

CHAPTER IV.

Schools in Persia.

Until missionaries entered the country the only schools in existence were the Mohammedan schools for boys only.

These schools are common to all Mohammedan countries. Here the pupil is taught to read and write, and to learn the ninety nine names of God known to Mohammedans. When he has made some progress in his studies he is given the first and last chapters of the Koran in Arabic to read, and though he may not understand a word of what he has read, his education is finished. To be able to read a single Persian book marks one as being a man of very liberal education.

The class-room in Persia would seem very strange to an American. The teacher, who is himself usually a man of very little learning, seats himself on the floor with the pupils seated round him in a ring. While studying the students sway their bodies backwards and forwards and repeat their lessons in a sing-song chant which can sometimes be heard at quite a little distance. Writing is done with reed pens on paper, and as a rest for the paper the pupils use their right knees, putting the left knees on the floor and supporting themselves in this uncomfortable position.

In addition to the schools just described the Mohammedans have some divinity schools. These are presided over by priests and are held in the mosques. In these schools the pupils are taught to read the Koran and some poetry and are given as much instruction as possible in astrology. The grace of loving one another is not taught in these schools and the pupils as a consequence quarrel very frequently. The weaker pupils receive no protection from the teacher, who on the contrary urges them on to re-

taliation. Encounters between the pupils of the different mosques are frequent.

Mohammedan pupils are punished very severely by their teachers when occasion demands. It is common for a peasant to say to the teacher when he takes his boy to school, "His bones are mine, but his flesh is yours. Teach him and punish him as you see fit." It is not surprising considering all the conditions that the Mohammedan boy grows up with very little respect for the feelings of others.

When the missionaries came they tried to start other schools and though opposed by the Mohammedans they were ultimately successful in starting schools for boys. After a while the demand for education grew and schools for girls were also erected. The schools are for the most part about on an equal footing with our common schools, but there are some more advanced institutions where teachers and preachers are educated. Students graduating from these higher schools usually return to their home districts and teach the smaller schools. Their salaries for this work would look small to an American school teacher as they only receive about $5.00 a month for their services and even this is not paid by a responsible board but is paid by the pupils themselves. The method of payment by the pupils is interesting and illustrates the difficulty the poorer classes of Persia meet with in trying to obtain an education. The pupils pay a certain sum per month for each subject studied. Under this system the children of the rich can afford to take five or six

subjects a day, while the poorer boys and girls can take only as many as they can afford.

The curriculum of the higher schools is as follows:

1st. year. Arithmetic, spelling, penmanship and the Bible.

2nd year. Spelling, grammar, penmanship, the Mohammedan language and the Bible.

3rd year. The Mohammedan and English languages, arithmetic, old Assyrian literature, correspondence, and the Medo-Persian study of the Gospel of John.

As in America, the school terms last only through the winter, but they are much shorter than here, beginning in November and closing at the end of March, the remaining 7 months being vacation.

There are two school sessions daily. Morning school opens at 9 A. M. and closes at noon. Afternoon school opens at 2 P. M. and closes at 5 P. M.

As in the Mohammedan schools, there are no desks or chairs, the pupils all sitting on the floor around their teacher, and reciting their lessons aloud. As they are not all studying the same lesson, the noise and the confusion caused by this oral method may be better imagined than described. Some of the brighter students have been of great assistance to the missionaries in translating the Assyrian manuscripts into English.

CHAPTER V.

The Position of Women in Persia.

In common with other Mohammedan countries, the lot of women in Persia is a very pitiable one. The policy of the Mohammedans is to keep the women ignorant, and consequently there are no schools for girls at all, very few women even in the highest circles of society being able to read or write. As a consequence, women know nothing of what happens outside except what their husbands or male relatives choose to tell them, and they can have no communication even with their friends. It often happens that during a husband's absence the wife has to employ a priest to write a letter for her and again to read her husband's reply when it comes to hand.

The indoor costume of the women consists of full divided skirts or bloomers reaching to the knees and leaving the legs and feet bare, but lately black or white pantaloons have found favor. The head covering consists of a square of cloth tied under the chin.

When out walking the women wear a long blue wrap covering their entire bodies, the face being hidden by a linen veil in which two small holes have been cut for the eyes. As all women are dressed alike for walking it is impossible even for a man to recognize his wife as a general thing should he meet her.

Women are not allowed to speak to men on the street, not even to their own husbands. Should

they wish to speak to each other they must draw aside where they cannot be seen. The veil over the face is worn to prevent the face being seen by a man. Fashions do not change as they do in America.

At gatherings of men, women are not allowed to appear, while men are excluded from gatherings of women. When the women gather together they paint their faces and blacken their eyelashes and eyebrows with antimony, while the hair is dyed with henna and plaited into long braids. Necklaces and charms are worn around the neck and bangles and bracelets on the arms.

Among the richer classes most of the women are idle, but the women of the poorer classes work very hard. Let us follow one of them through an ordinary summer day's work. Rising in the early morning she does the milking (women always do the milking in Persia), and her general housework; then taking her sickle she goes out into the fields and spends the day cutting weeds, and in the evening returns home carrying on her back a five-foot square of canvas filled with grass for the cows and buffaloes and their young. Widows do the harvesting, weeding, sewing, spinning, etc.

The famous Persian rugs and shawls are chiefly made by the women of the middle classes. The yarn is spun and dyed at home. A single rug will take three or four months to complete.

Equality between husband and wife is an unknown thing in Persia. The wife is the absolute slave of the husband's pleasure and comfort and so long has this been her lot that she does not dream of such rights as women in Christian lands possess.

In time of sickness the position of the Persian women is pitiable in the extreme. Here perhaps more than at any other time in her life her condition will appeal to her American sisters, and this is true not only of the women of Persia, but of women all through the Orient. Several things contribute to this. In the first place all through Mohammedan countries there exists a spirit of fatalism. The Moslem will accept reverses and misfortunes with the word "Kismet" or "Fate," meaning that the things that come could not possibly have been avoided and that it is no good trying to fight off the inevitable. Sickness is thus accepted with resignation, for if the sufferer's fate be to live she will live without human aid, while if her fate be to die, she will die no matter what efforts are made to bring about her recovery. Again the people of the Orient almost universally believe that sickness is the result of demon possession, and the Moslems treat sickness therefore not by trying to cure the body but by making the body so uncomfortable that the evil spirits will not want to stay in it, and this is accom-

plished both by torture and by the neglect of proper medical treatment. But the fact that Mohammedan women are secluded, not allowed to be seen, is the most potent of all in making sickness a terrible thing indeed for her. Men may not see her face and must diagnose the case without this most important factor, and as a consequence, even should a doctor be called in, which is not always the case, the chances for recovery are very remote should the sickness be at all a serious one. But the chances of recovery are made markedly smaller by the fact that the native doctor of the Orient has little or no knowledge of medicines, and relies mainly on superstitions, charms, incantations and the like. For instance, in the case of a fever the native doctor may order that a chicken be killed. This having been done he uses its blood to write a charm and prescribes that the patient burn that charm, put the ashes of it in a cup of water and drink the water. That completes his treatment. The dead chicken forms his fee. To tie seven knots in a white thread and wear it round the waist for fifteen to twenty days is another remedy for fever, while yet another is to remove the clothing and jump into cold water before breakfast.

Should cholera, small-pox, or some other epidemic come to a town or village the women are helpless.

The men may flee to the mountains to escape the disease, but the women and children are left to their fate, and it is no uncommon thing under such circumstances for them to fall down and die without any assistance at all, no one to even so much as give a cup of cold water to lessen the tortures of the disease. Truly the condition of women in Persia, bad enough at the best of times, becomes terrible in times of sickness and epidemic, and should appeal to the love and sympathy of all Christian women. It is small wonder that to such people, needy, helpless, neglected, the coming of the medical missionary, with power to alleviate suffering and cure disease, seems like the coming of some angelic messenger. I think that if ever Christianity is to have any great and widespread influence in Persia it will be through the medium of the medical missionary, and lady medical missionaries in Mohammedan countries are almost indispensable from the fact that men are not permitted to see the faces of the women.

Are there not some who read this little booklet whose hearts will go out to the women of Persia and who as they read of their sisters living and dying under such circumstances, and hear the voice of the Christ who died for the Persian woman as well as the American woman saying, "Whom shall I send?" will answer, "Here am I, send me!"

CHAPTER VI.

The Harem.

The Harem or Hareem, called in different places also the haramgah, mahallsarai and zananah, is the portion of the Mohammedan household set apart for the use of the women. The Koran requires that Mohammedan women shall not have any fellowship with any men other than their husbands, or such male relatives as are so near of kin to them that for this reason there is no possibility of their marrying. Under these circumstances it is imperative that some provision be made for a lady to entertain her friends, and such provision is found in the Harem.

The women's apartments are arranged around an open courtyard. The apartments themselves consist of long halls divided off for privacy not by doors but by thick, heavy curtains between the pillars of the halls, light and air being admitted only from that side of the apartment facing the courtyard. During the day the bedsteads are arranged at the back of these apartments, but at night are placed for repose in any position in the apartments or courtyard that may be selected. Chairs and tables are never used unless on the occasion of a visit by Europeans, the usual custom being to recline on the carpets or rugs spread upon the floor. To people accustomed to the freedom of the western

countries the seclusion of these Eastern women seems a great hardship, but they themselves do not count it so. Accustomed from infancy through many generations to seclusion they accept it as part of their life and have no wish to depart from it. From the time a girl is four years old she is kept rigidly in seclusion, both mother and nurse taking great pains to accomplish this, and thus brought up the women of the East look upon it as a disgrace to be seen unveiled by men.

Though secluded from male company the Persian woman is permitted almost unlimited female company and as a consequence parties and visits between the ladies are of very frequent occurrence.

At these times of festivity the harem presents a scene of life and gaiety. The usual quietness and bareness of the apartments gives way to bustle and the buzz of conversation. Brilliantly dressed women mingle in the halls and the playing of the children and the jeweled figures of the women present a very pleasing spectacle to the eye.

When paying these visits the women do not go alone. All ladies who pretend to any position in society have, in addition to their slaves and domestics, from two to ten female companions, and on the occasion of their paying visits they always take at least one of these with them, together with two or three

slaves, as no visitor expects the servants of the hostess to wait upon her.

On the occasion of very large parties not only the halls are occupied but the open courtyard also, and when this is done shelter from the weather is provided by awnings of white calico.

As these visits usually last at least three days provision has to be made for the sleeping of the guests, but in Persia that does not mean very much preparation. Bedsteads are never provided for the guests, who recline by day and sleep by night on the carpets with which the floor has been strewn.

The kitchen of the harem is not large enough to provide food sufficient for these parties, and so the greater part of the meals is provided by caterers who make a livelihood out of this trade, the choicest dishes only being cooked by the servants of the harem.

As in private homes the meals are eaten while seated round a cloth spread on the floor. No knives or forks are used, all food being conveyed to the mouth with the fingers. Both before and after meals the fingers and mouth are rinsed in water, and to eat without this ceremony would be considered uncleanly. After meals the huggah or pipe is brought out and smoked, for almost all females smoke in Persia.

Only two meals a day are taken in the harem, the first at from 10 to 12 o'clock, followed by a sleep of two or three hours, and the second twelve hours from the first, after which all sleep until near the dawn of day.

Speaking of the life of the zanana of India, which strongly resembles the Harem, someone has given the following testimony:

"I have sometimes passed an hour or two in witnessing these innocent amusements, without any feeling of regret for the brief sacrifice of time I have made. * * * At first I pitied the apparent monotony of their lives; but this feeling has worn away by intimacy with the people, who are thus precluded from mixing generally with the world. They are happy in their confinement; and never having felt the sweets of liberty, would not know how to use the boon if it were granted them. As the bird from the nest immured in a cage is both cheerful and contented, so are those females. They have not, it is true, many intellectual resources, but they have naturally good understandings, and having learned their duty, they strive to fulfil it. So far as I have had any opportunity of making personal observations on their general character, they appear to me obedient wives, dutiful daughters, affectionate

mothers and mistresses, sincere friends and liberal benefactresses to the distressed poor. These are their moral qualifications, and in their religious duties, they are zealous in performing the several ordinances which they have been instructed by their parents or husbands to observe.

"To ladies accustomed from infancy to confinement, this kind of life is by no means irksome; they have their employments and their amusements, and though these are not exactly to our taste, nor suited to our mode of education, they are not the less relished by those for whom they were invented. They perhaps wonder equally at some of our modes of dissipating time, and fancy we might spend it more profitably. Be that as it may, the Moslem ladies, with whom I have long been intimate, appear to me always happy, contented, and satisfied with the seclusion to which they were born; they desire no other, and I have ceased to regret they cannot be made partakers of that freedom of intercourse with the world we deem so essential to our happiness, since their health suffers nothing from that confinement, by which they are preserved from a variety of snares and temptations; besides which, they would deem it disgraceful in the highest degree to mix indiscriminately with men who are not relatives. They are educated from infancy for retire-

ment, and they can have no wish that the custom should be changed which keeps them apart from the society of men who are not very nearly related to them. Female society is unlimited, and that they enjoy without restraint."

In spite of this testimony, Christian American women, remembering the helplessness of their Persian sisters in time of sickness; their close confinement; their lack of education; their subordinate position in the home; and their ignorance of anything outside their own homes, will surely spare a thought of pity and a prayer to the Great Father that some day in His good time some ray of light from Western Christianity will shine into the darkness of their lives, that they may be able to take the place that God intended for them, when He said "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him an helpmeet for him."

CHAPTER VII.

Customs.

MAKING LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN PERSIA BY THE ASSYRIANS.

In the world at large the children are reared up to manhood and womanhood playing and associating more or less together. In Persia when the boys are over 12 or 13 years of age they are strictly for-

bidden to speak to unmarried women. But when they reach the age of 15 years they are encouraged to get married. From 15 to 18 is the customary age for boys to marry.

The way a young man finds his bride to be is chiefly by attending the picnics or carnivals which take place four or five times each year. To these carnivals both young and old go, enjoying themselves by playing, dancing and making love. There the young man looks for a girl and when he sees one who attracts his attention more than the others, he inquires of near friends who she is, and her parents' names and possessions. He may have courage to introduce himself to her and speak a few words, though often no words are spoken. He goes home and for some weeks his mind is occupied by thoughts of the young lady, his love for her, and his hope of marrying her.

In the olden time when writing was unknown a messenger or mediator was used in making love. Now it is in the up-to-date fashion of writing letters. For some time after their mutual love is known, it is kept secret from the parents. Then in some way, either through his uncle or by letter, the boy reveals it to his father, who enquires the name of the young lady and whether his son loves her. The son in great embarrassment tells the names of the

girl and her parents. If the girl's parents should be poorer financially than the boy's parents, the latter may object, yet if the boy continues to love the girl and will not give her up, his parents may give their consent. After a while the boy's father sends a messenger to the girl's home to ask if they would give their daughter to the messenger's friends' son. This question is not put while the girl is in the house, for it is a custom in Persia when visitors call that the children and servants go to another apartment or out of the house while the visitor presents his petition.

When the messenger comes he is well treated and partakes of a lunch, after which he presents his request. The parents up to this time know nothing of their daughter being in love. They therefore request time for consideration, saying, "In two weeks we will answer." If such an answer is given to the messenger there is hope for the boy, but if they say, "Our girl is not fit to be your boy's wife," there is no hope. If the former answer is given the messenger brings the information to the boy's father, who then patiently awaits the set time. In the meantime the girl's father gets all the information he can concerning the boy, his character and moral life, and whether he is a Christian and also about his parents and their standing in the community,

and if these enquiries prove satisfactory, all is well. The day before the answer is to be given the father asks the girl what she wants for a wedding gift, the kind of dress, etc. When the messenger comes the next day, after some preliminary talk, he repeats the question of marriage.

The answer is still not given, only a further request is made that the girl wants from the boy's parents one gold ring, one silver ring, two earrings, one pair of new shoes, one silver belt and one silk head garment. The son and father gladly purchase these articles as a wedding present, yet even then it is not settled definitely that the wedding shall occur, as the girl has been absent while the negotiations have taken place, only once having been asked what she wanted for her wedding present. In case she does not love she says so to her father at that time, but if the father likes the boy and his parents suit him, he commands her to marry, sometimes bringing in some relatives and neighbors who also favor the boy to persuade her to marry, though this latter is seldom necessary as correspondence has taken place before between the young people. The boy's father sends a message to the girl's father that he will come over to his home some evening (the date is set). Then the boy's father calls some of his near relatives to go with him. The girl's father has also

invited some of his kinsmen to be present on the occasion.

When they meet a general introduction takes place. They are then seated for supper, first having a merry time. After the meal everybody leaves the room but the visitors and the parents of the girl. Then the girl's father asks, "What may be your request?" The boy's father says, "May I have your daughter for my son's wife?" The girl's father announces this to his relatives present. Then the prospective father-in-law asks personally each of the girl's kinsfolk for their consent, which is nearly always given. When the mother is asked she slowly and in a low voice replies, "Yes." The father, being the last to be asked, answers firmly, *"Yes!"*

After the father has given his consent the relatives on the boy's side all clap hands and rejoice because the girl now belongs to them. Then one of the boy's relatives kisses all the girl's relatives—who are present—on their hands. Then the boy's father presents his gifts bought for the wedding, besides some candy called "sweetnight," meaning happiness. The pastor (who is always present at such feasts) takes the wedding ring and two witnesses, giving the ring to one of them and saying "Take this ring to the girl (who at that moment is at a neighbor's home) and say, 'We have now come to tell you that you are given in marriage and we present

the wedding ring.' '' If she does not love the boy she refuses to accept the ring, but if she does love, she receives the ring as a sign, but she does not speak a word. The next moment she returns the ring, which is brought to the minister, and he asks God's blessing upon the union, after which all go to their homes.

During the following days the parties on both sides consult each other as to the wedding arrangements and gifts. All wedding gifts (cloth) to the girl, are bought by the father-in-law to be, the amount varying according to his financial ability, though the usual cost of a wedding is from $100 to $200.

The mother of the girl presents her daughter with many home-made articles, such as rugs, bedcloth, etc. All gifts bought for the wedding are first delivered at her home, where the dressmaker and tailor prepare her dresses, etc. When all is ready, the wedding day is announced. One or two days before the wedding the father of the boy sends a man with a drum and flute, beating the drum and piping the flute all around the village, announcing the wedding. In a short while a number of people (men, women and boys), are gathered to supper in the bridegroom's home. After supper the floor is cleared of its rugs, carpets, etc., and dancing is carried on until 4 o'clock in the morning, after which they

go home to sleep. At 8 or 9 A. M. the drum and flute are again sounded throughout the village. This calls out a number of young men dressed in their best with guns, and two or three rigged carriages. These men go to the girl's home to bring her to the wedding. When they reach her home, they shout, sing, dance and beat the drum, announcing their arrival. The bride is dressed in her best clothes and before she leaves the house is veiled so that none can see her face. She is escorted by two ladies to a horse which she is to ride. While tarrying outside her door the young men toss money upon her head, signifying riches. The party then marches to the wedding place, having sent a messenger in advance to announce their coming. When she arrives at the boy's door he goes up on the roof with ten other young men where he is treated with wine and apples are given him. These apples he lightly tosses down to the girl while still on horseback. The significance of this action is as follows: When Adam was in Eden he was tempted by Eve to eat apples from the forbidden tree. Now the bridegroom throws the apples back to her, saying he is free. After this ceremony the bride is helped down from the horse and led into a neighbor's house.

That same night again the drum and flute repeat their rounds of the village, calling the people the

third time, and supper is served to all who come. After supper the bridegroom receives gifts from the guests, the value of these gifts sometimes amounting to several hundreds of dollars. Then all the people go home.

The next morning, the third day, the wedding couple with the minister march to church, where they stand before the minister during the ceremony. The usual questions are put to the couple. To seal the act the groom takes the wedding ring and puts it on one of the girl's fingers. Then the wedding is over and all go home, but for the next few days callers come in hundreds to see the wedding gifts.

The bride does not speak to any callers, not even to her father-in-law. If he asks her a question she answers by a gesture and is always veiled. This lasts for but six weeks or two months and then she is more free and settles down to the regular routine of her married life.

Funerals in Persia.

There are only a few hospitals in Persia and when any get sick they prefer to stay at home, some absolutely refusing to be sent to the hospital or to take any medicine, except that which is homemade. If the sickness increases and there is much pain they may call for the doctor, who often finds after

a diagnosis of the case that it is too late to do anything. The common diseases are kidney trouble, liver trouble, sore eyes, rheumatism, consumption, heart trouble, indigestion and fever (typhoid), with a few other lesser complaints such as we have in America (headache, etc). The sick one lies during the winter in the room which is used for the kitchen, dining room, parlor and bedroom, but in the summer the rest of the household sleep on the roof, giving the sufferer more rest. During sickness the neighbors make visits and talk with the sick, often for hours, and when some go others come, making it a torture rather than comfort for the invalid. The mother is the nurse and she looks after her patient's comfort, while others look for his pain.

During the hot summer days the mother fans and gives cold water to the suffering. If she is a Christian she often kneels at the bedside praying to the merciful Father for her sick one. When the end has come the near relatives of the sufferer gather together and weep and mourn with the parents. Often even the people in the village stop working and come to mourn, showing their sympathy with the bereaved ones. It is really part of their religion to help mourn for the dead. If it is the husband who has died the wife and children sit close around the corpse weeping. Then all the

dead person's clothes are laid on the corpse, from which is taken one garment by the mother who presses it to her bosom crying hysterically. If any other member of the family has died before, their clothes are also brought forth and wept over. This weeping and sobbing continues all day.

If death occurs in the morning the burial is at night; if death occurs at evening or night the burial is the next day. A corpse is not kept over 24 hours at home. There are no undertakers to conduct the funerals, this thing being attended to by the family and neighbors. When a man dies two old men prepare the corpse in the casket. When a woman dies two old women undertake this office. The casket is painted either black or red, as desired. When all is ready the minister sings a few verses of a sympathetic song and says a few words of sympathy. The funeral procession is headed by a band of singers with four young men carrying the casket on their shoulders, then the relatives and friends follow in a long procession. The coffin is first taken to the church, where the pastor preaches a sermon for the living. When the sermon is over he asks the people to testify as to the life and character of the deceased, after which the cover is lifted off the casket, giving the mourners a chance to take a last look at the deceased. The parents and near relatives

kiss him good bye. After the lid is put on the cortege proceeds to the cemetery. On the way, about two blocks from the church, the procession stops for a few moments, again viewing the remains. (I remember while at home a young man died and on the way to the burial, a cousin took soft mud in her hands and put it on her head to show her grief.) After a few minutes' rest the procession continues its way to the cemetery, which is always near the village. At the graveside the casket is decked with sticks across the cover and green grass on the top. This takes the place of flowers. When the casket is lowered into the grave the minister sings softly and reads the usual formula, "From earth to earth, and from earth again." Then all the people present take some earth and put it in the grave, the minister speaks a few words of encouragement to the sorrowing ones and the people also show their sympathy by shaking hands with the bereaved. Then all go back to the house for supper. The next day the neighbor women come for dinner and to show their sympathy.

The bereaved wear black clothes for about two months. Twice during the first year after death the parents or relatives bring bread and clothes of the deceased to the grave and leave them there for whosoever wants them. A monument of engraved

stone, with the name, date of birth and date of death, on it, is placed on the grave, to keep fresh the memory of the departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Religions of Persia.

Previous to the entrance of Christian missions, Persia had four or five different religions, all of which had a larger or smaller following. These religions included Nestorianism, Devil-worshippers, Fire-worshippers and Mohammedans.

The Nestorians number some 75,000. Their religion is a corrupted Christianity. The founder, Nestorius, was a prominent man in the early Christian Church, but strayed from the truth, contending that Jesus Christ was not one Person, human and divine, but two persons, God dwelling in human flesh, and that only the human body died, not the God-man, thus denying the power of the atonement.

The Devil-Worshippers worship the Devil himself just as we worship Christ. Their prayers are addressed to him and their hopes based on him. Their beliefs are to the Christian very strange. They believe that originally there was but one God, who created the earth. After this he divided and formed beside himself six other gods, who are—the sun, the moon, the morning and evening twilight, the

morning star, the evening star and the seven planets. These seven gods then created the angels. In time the angel created by the original god rebelled and was cast out of heaven, but repenting, wept so bitterly over his sin and showed such evident contrition that the god forgave him and restored him to Paradise, where he showed such zeal in doing good that he came to find more favor in the eyes of the god than all the others, and so was made greater than them, and called—Melek Taus. In some ways their beliefs of the beginning of the world correspond with those of the Christian faith, but there is very much untruth also in them. They believe that when Jesus hung on the Cross He did not really die but was taken by this Melek-Taus to heaven, where they two and God now form the trinity. This will explain why they at present worship the devil, for in their estimation he is one now with the Father and the Son.

These devil-worshippers are densely ignorant, it being a part of their religious belief that it is dangerous and sinful to read any books at all. The only one of the sect who can read is the head of the sect, and he is taught the Arabic language. A copy of the Koran is used for this purpose, but even then only with great precautions. One very important part of their beliefs is that it is the grossest sin for

anyone to speak or hear the name of Satan, and as that name appears in the Koran, a friendly Christian is pressed into service who covers it up with wax wherever it occurs. If in spite of this precaution, the name is visible when the lesson is being given the whole book is promptly shut up and burned and a new copy obtained.

The devil-worshippers only have one sacred book, the original, and even that they do not understand, their belief in this particular being that it never can be understood until the Devil comes again and makes it plain. It is guarded with the greatest care.

The cock is sacred to these people because they believe that to be the form the Devil takes, and their sacred images of him are in this shape.

"Devil-worship" is one of the blackest of heathen religions, bringing ignorance and countenancing violence.

The Fire-Worshippers—called "Guebres" (or ungodly) by the Mohammedans, number about 15,000. They are the followers of Zoroaster, who is believed by many to have lived in Persia and there to have founded the religion that bears his name. In fact in the vicinity of Urmia are found hills of ashes which are supposed to mark the places of worship. The god of the sect is fire and they accordingly worship the sun and moon and treat all

fire with respect. Unlike most heathen religions they teach a degree of equality for the women. They are educated and polygamy is forbidden unless after nine years of married life no children have been born, when the husband is allowed to take another wife. Divorce is forbidden and adultery and fornication are very severely punished. In great contrast to the "devil-worshippers" they set very high store on education, every parent doing his best to give his children a good education.

Mohammedanism has by far the largest number of followers of any religion of Persia.

It is believed to have been in Persia that Mohammed lived and instituted the religion that bears his name. Born in 571 A. D., his early history is very interesting. His father died before his birth, and he was raised by a tribe of Bedouins until he reached the age of five years. Then he was restored to his relatives and found a home, after the death of his mother, first with his grandfather and later with his uncle. In his early manhood he often accompanied his uncle's caravans on their distant journeys and thus came in touch with the outside world, and had the impressions of Christianity left on his mind by his visits to so-called Christian countries been such as they should have been, the founder of the religion which has been and is one of the

greatest foes to Christianity in the world might have been instead a faithful soldier of the Cross. As it was, however, the Christian Church was torn asunder in those early days by bitter doctrinal disputes, and even in those places where these disputes did not have so much effect, there was deadness and formality in the Church instead of life and reality, and into the heart of the young Mohammed was instilled a hatred of the apparent emptiness and sham of the Christian faith. At about 25 years of age he married a wealthy widow who proved to be a most devoted and loving wife for him, and a true helpmeet in his life. Later in life he and his wife spent many a lonely vigil in the rocky, barren mountains surrounding Mecca and here Mohammed claims to have received many direct revelations from God. These revelations in course of time were brought together in one volume called the Koran, which is the "Bible" of the Moslems, and is counted by them as the authority on all matters, the laws of the country being based upon it, as well as the religious laws of the sect. The Koran, however, was probably not completed until after his death.

Rejected at first by his countrymen, Mohammed persevered and in time he found himself surrounded by an ever-increasing number of adherents. His method of adding converts was bloody in the ex-

treme. His enemies he sought to utterly destroy and the sword was carried into their cities and villages. By this means also he increased in wealth and possessions. In 630 he had attained such a position of power that he captured the city of Mecca, thereafter the sacred city of Islam, and here, at the age of 61, he died.

He was bitter in his hatred of enemies, as is strikingly evident from his treatment of them, as mentioned above. Not being able to bridle his lustful passions, he had overstepped the number of wives allowed (in all he married 11 wives) to the faithful, but to cover this he had inserted in the Koran a special permission for himself to marry as many wives as he pleased. It is strange that men should consent to be bound by a religion, the founder of which even did not submit to its teachings and requirements. How great a difference, as we look at this brief sketch of his life, is seen between the bloody, licentious life of the "Prophet of God," as he called himself, and the lowly life of Jesus of Nazareth, and how pure and beautiful our Lord's life stands out in contrast with such a life as Mohammed's. Reader, if you have never yet settled the question, "What think ye of Christ?" think of it now as you contrast His claims and His life with the claims and life of the great heathen

leader of men, and contrast with the sword of Islam the gentle words of the Christ, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart."

After the death of Mohammed Islam spread far and wide under its victorious armies and nation after nation was forced at the point of the sword to accept its teachings. By the fourteenth century it had taken possession of southeastern Europe, north Africa, western Asia and had even spread as far as India, and even to-day, tho' in a less bloodthirsty way, it is extending its teachings southward in Africa.

"Islam," the name given to the religion by its followers, means "full submission to God."

The main points of difference between Islam and Christianity are as follows:

1. God.—Mohammedans believe in One God as Creator and Mohammed as His Prophet. . .

This is a flat denial of the Christian doctrine of the trinity of God, and ignores the atoning merits of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Ghost.

2. Doctrine.—Mohammedans believe that Mohammed is the sole Controller of all things, both on earth and in heaven; that he governs sickness and health, war and peace, etc.

Cleansing the body from its pollution cleanses the soul also from its sin.

3. Prayer.—Mohammedans pray four or five times a day in a lonely place or under a tree, always with their faces turned toward Mecca.

4. Faith.—Every Mohammedan believes that at death he goes to heaven while all who do not believe are destined to hell. As a natural result of their religion Mohammedans look down with contempt on people of all other beliefs.

In Persia a Christian native has very much of persecution to bear. He is termed "infidel," "Christian dog." The best Christian is considered inferior to the meanest Mohammedan, and his word has less weight in a Court of Justice. Should a Christian be struck by a Mohammedan he dare not retaliate for fear of his life. Christian reader, spare a prayer for your brethren in Christ living under such conditions as these!

Christianity.—In 1834 a Mr. Thomas attempted to found a mission in Persia, but owing to the hostility of the Mohammedans his attempt proved a failure. Later, in 1871, the door was partly opened and missionaries entered and began work there only to find a country which was in absolute spiritual darkness. Once in the country, however, their lives gradually began to tell on the natives, and little by

little they won the interest and esteem of some of them, who later took the stand as Christians in spite of the persecutions through which they had to pass. Their lives in turn showed such a remarkable change after their conversion that they influenced their friends and neighbors, and so in face of the opposition of its enemies Christianity spread in the country.

Among the Christian denominations now represented in Persia, the following are the most numerous:

Roman Catholics, with 14,000 members.
Greek Catholics.
Presbyterians, with 6,000 members.
Lutherans, with 1,500 members.
Baptists, with 800 members.

So that, counting the Roman Catholics (but not the Greek Catholics, of which body I have no figures) there are 22,300 Christian Church members in Persia, or one to every 450 of the people, while the proportion of Protestant Church members is one to every 1,200 of the people.

THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION—TO MEN.
COME TO JESUS.

1. Matthew 11, 28-30. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

John 3; 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

John 6; 37. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

GO, PREACH GOSPEL TO THE WHOLE WORLD.

Matthew 28, 19-20. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

JUN 3 1909

CONCLUSION.

Reader, you have perused these pages and have in your mind some faint picture of the condition of my country. Can you look at that picture without your heart being stirred with pity for these millions of my countrymen living in darkness? While Jesus lived on earth it was said of Him "When He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion on them because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." That is a picture of my countrymen today. "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest."

"What if your own were starving,
Famishing, needy, in pain,
And yet you knew where golden grew
Rich fruit and ripened grain.
Would you turn aside, while they gasped and died,
And leave them 'mong the slain?

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